

# ISRAEL'S CULTURAL ORIGINS

## NEAR EASTERN ANCIENT HISTORY SERIES COMPILATION



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## Things You Need to Know About Isra'el in King David's Time

Over many years at church, I have heard Bible Study leaders ask why such a small area of desert land has caused so much trouble throughout history? They have always answered with a spiritual warfare focus, but looking back in time, to when this area was central in the known, most inhabited part of the world, there are many reasons why Isra'el was a key area above and beyond the spiritual.

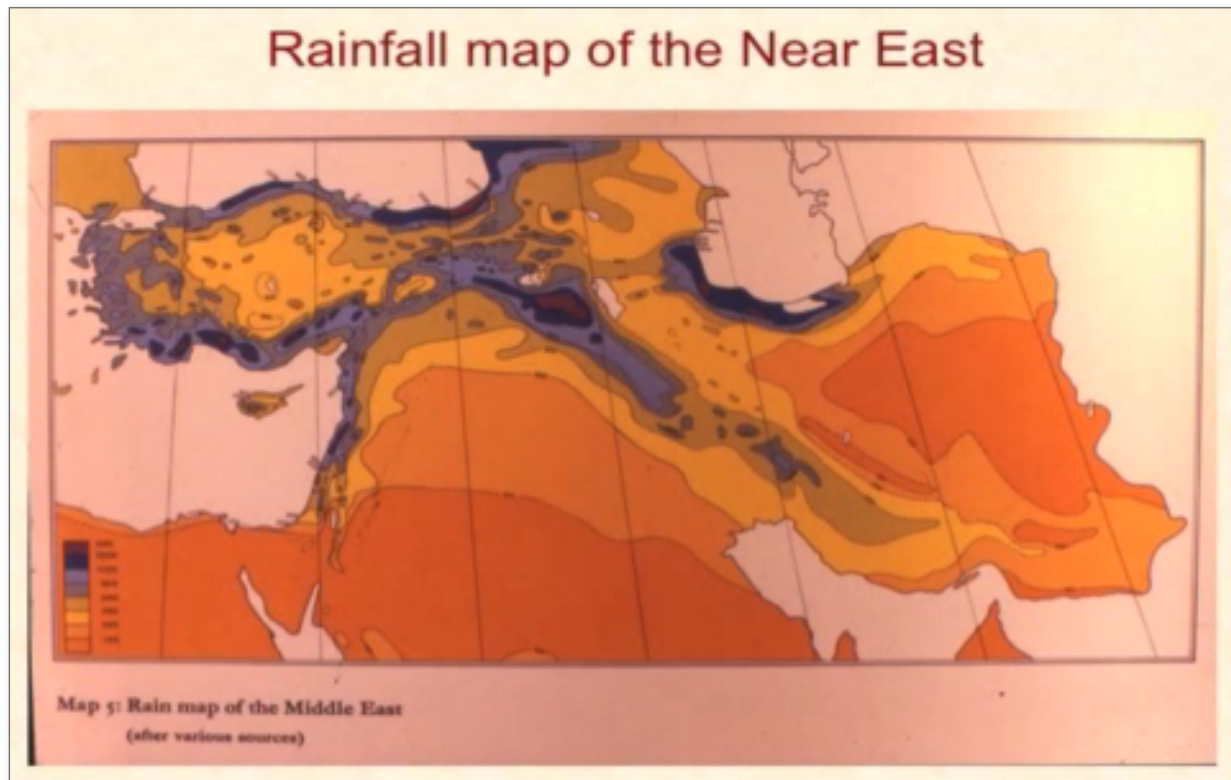
The facts below set the scene for David's Kingdom and explain why Isra'el had so much trouble with neighbouring nations.

1. Isra'el was less impacted by desert in David's time and lay in an ancient fertile crescent that circles the west and top of the Far and Middle East. The **rainfall** was excellent, and thus crops and cattle were able to thrive. It was indeed the land of milk and honey [Ref. Exodus 23:3] and worth fighting over by the surrounding nations. Unfortunately this screen shot isn't clear, but the blue areas indicate good rainfall.

Like Australia, Isra'els geography is misunderstood. If you look at Isra'el now, you will find that the entire country is not **desert**. There are snow fields in the mountains, the area around Galilee is stunning, and the west is bordered by the beauty of the Mediterranean. Don't believe the Bible movies which like to film in the cheaper desert areas, misrepresenting Isra'el's full natural beauty. Many areas of the Middle East which are now desert, were once thriving agricultural areas of beauty.

The encroachment of the desert comes from soil depletion and land clearing. God told His people to let their fields rest one year in each seven, and they disobeyed; thus what we see now is a sad reminder of what happens when we

misuse natural resources. The land has suffered accordingly from these poor farming practices, war and other calamities. A lot can change in a few thousand years.



2. With good food supply comes **population growth**. This places stress on the available land, food and water resources, and leads to raids and wars with neighbouring nations, as everyone needs the land to survive. In particular, God had always commanded His people to be fruitful and multiply (e.g. Genesis 48:4 and Leviticus 26:9 and many more), so they needed the full extent of the land which had been promised to them by God. [Ref. Numbers 34 gives the borders.]

3. Isra'el's west, along the Mediterranean, had a major **lucrative trade route** running north to south, through it. Like the ancient city of Petra which was incredibly rich, if a nation can control a trade route, they can make a fortune in providing travellers with food, water, safe accommodation and safe escorts to their destination; and they can also choose to tax caravans travelling through. One thousand years or so after David, the Silk Road from modern Asia through to the Mediterranean, ran straight through Isra'el. It's a key site.

4. King Saul and David's time saw the **fall of the bronze age economy**. The late Bronze Age Collapse crippled all the empires and city states from modern day Greece up to Turkey, across to the Persian Gulf affecting Iran and Iraq, through the area of Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Palestine and right down into Egypt. There is a list of around 38 \*cities which show destruction layers from this time frame, some which were critical to economic survival. The impact of the collapse was greater than the end of the Roman Empire and is the greatest economic disaster in all of history.

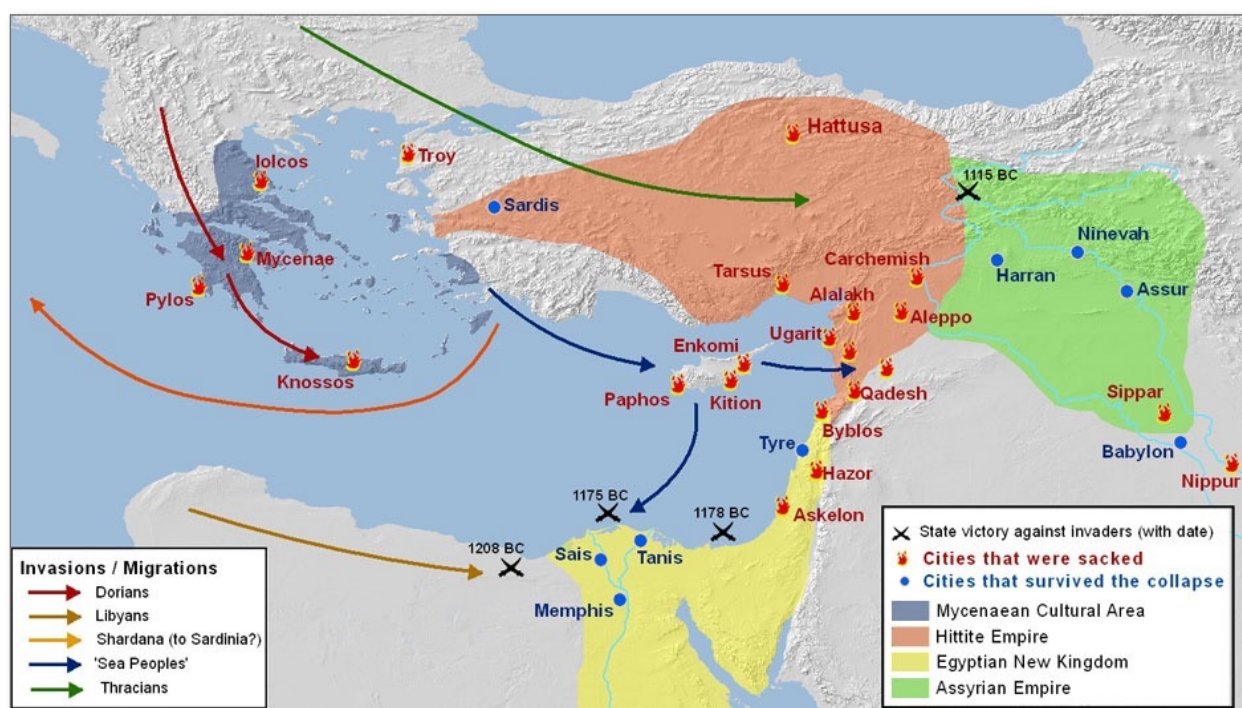
Cities were completely abandoned, with no clues as to the cause left behind; the population dramatically declined, famines occurred, and even powerful nations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, wilted and struggled for several hundred years. The affects were the same as if our modern key trading cities such as Singapore, New York and London all ceased to function within fifty years, with no one else arising to cover their function.

This collapse occurred during the era of the Book of Judges (1200 BC) and the effects lasted into and past Saul and David's time. Smaller nations such as Mycenae, Minoa, and Ugarit ceased to exist altogether and Cyprus lost written language and all trade for around 300 years. The loss of

written language is why the era following the collapse is known as a dark age. In essence, the progression of civilisation was catastrophically set back.

Before the collapse, the Near East had a very modern society which was not equalled until the height of the Greek Empire around seven hundred years later. The area is considered by historians to have had an “international economy” with extensive, well engineered diplomatic relations between the countries, and trade networks which brought a great deal of wealth into the region. Bureaucracy was in full swing, laws were well established, public works were undertaken, better military tactics were being developed and civilisation was anything but stone age and backwards. Life was surprisingly modern, much, much earlier than the Greek and Roman empires. Their later success was birthed in this period.

At this time, as we do today, most of the population relied on food supplies coming through the trade networks, as the bulk of the population dwelt in cities and worked as merchants or manufacturers. When the trade routes collapsed, many people faced starvation as they didn't have their own land for food production. It is thought that natural disasters such as earthquakes and the possible eruption of the volcano at what is now Santorini, contributed to the collapse, as one simple factor alone is insufficient to create such wide-spread, long-term havoc. There is also a theory that climate change during that time led to the perfect storm which created the complex collapse.



There is archaeological evidence to back this up. The Near East is now much drier than it had been and the flora and fauna has dramatically changed as well. Elephants and hippopotamus populations used to roam Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), creating local sources of ivory. They are long gone, perhaps from hunting, perhaps from climate change or a combination of both?

Before and during the collapse, there were many diplomatic letters sent back and forth between Kings, such as between the Kings of Egypt and Ugarit, which provide useful accounts of what occurred in the Near East during this time, some which were cries for help because of the invasion of the Sea Peoples.

From King Ammurapi to the King of Alasiya: *"My father, behold, the enemy's ships came (here); my cities were burned, and they did evil things in my country. Does not my father know that all my troops and chariots are in the Land of Hatti, and all my ships are in the Land of Lukka?... Thus, the country is abandoned to itself. May my father know it: the seven ships of the enemy that came here inflicted much damage upon us."* Translation by Jean Nougaryol et al. (1968) Ugaritica V: 87–90 no. 24.

These letters were well preserved on baked clay tablets, but in the dark age that followed the collapse, this form of communication ceased, leaving us with a frustrating black hole of lost information. Most of what we have comes from destruction layers uncovered by archaeologists, pollen records showing evidence of famines and some clay tablets. For that reason, this period is considered to be one of the great mysteries of history.

Disenfranchised populations threatened everyone's national security, and the standard of living plummeted. The arrival of these "Sea Peoples," as Egypt referred to them, (which we believe were the Philistines), were part of the Bronze Age Collapse. They arrived in several mass migrations, attacked the local inhabitants with the men at the forefront and their women, children and all of their possessions following close behind. It appears they were also homeless because of the collapse and this is the cause of their arrival in Canaan, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Isra'el and the Hittites land to the north-west. Not only were trading routes cut by invasion, but communication routes would have also been affected, so the problem simply snow balled as conditions became worse.



## The Impact on Isra'el

We don't know the actual impact of the collapse on Isra'el, except that David's reign must have still been affected by the insecurity of the surrounding nations and still reduced trade routes. We do know that he was active diplomatically and that some luxury goods were available through Tyre, but life was still hampered by upheaval and uncertainty. It is not a peaceful time for anyone. Trade, government and communication didn't have to be reinvented, but it was partially suffocated until empires such as Neo-Assyria could rise up and completely stamp out security threats.

War has always been common in antiquity in order to gain more land and better resources, but it does appear to be heightened in this period, which is seen in the desperate pleas for help to allied kings as seen above. Isra'el would have also been economically affected as trade was functioning at a lesser level than the past, and raiders were keen to relieve the Israelites of what wealth they did have.

*"Many people say, 'Who will show us better times?' Let your face smile on us, LORD."* Psalm 4:6  
The necessity of enlarging and securing borders for economic survival and to ward off the Philistine threat, could have been the reason why kings routinely went to war every spring. [Ref. 2]

## Reference Sources

Whilst there have been many, the information on rainfall comes from The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. You may benefit from their videos on the Near East and Ancient world.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/JamesHenryBreasted/videos>

Please also visit this TED Talk on Your words may predict your future mental health | Mariano Sigman which talks about a small part of the puzzle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTL9tm7S1Io>



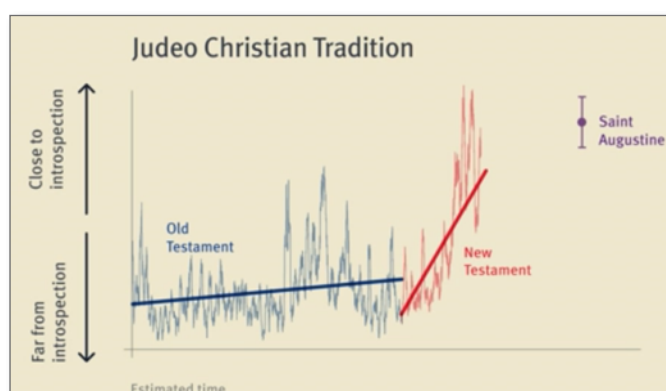
Samuel 11:1] In 1 Samuel 13:19 we know that the Philistines were withholding blacksmiths from the Israelites, as they didn't wish them to access better weapons. They would have done the same to any other territories they could bully, and would have to have been a menace to trade in and out of the area as well. This kind of stranglehold produces poverty, which gives rise to desperation and conflict. It all comes down to survival, possibly mixed with greed.

Long-term struggles such as these exhaust populations and can also create the kind of power struggles which threatened David's leadership, even into his old age. [Ref. Psalm 71] David's inability to quell all security threats against Isra'el quickly may have made him unpopular. It is easy to look back now and see all the factors and realise why David was still going to war twenty years after he became King of Isra'el, but to his population at that time, their main concern was that life was scary, unpredictable and tough and they needed deliverance now!

*"Meanwhile, my enemies lay traps to kill me.  
Those who wish me harm make plans to ruin me.  
All day long they plan their treachery.  
But I am deaf to all their threats.  
I am silent before them as one who cannot speak.  
I choose to hear nothing,  
and I make no reply.  
For I am waiting for you, O LORD.  
You must answer for me, O Lord my God."* Psalm 38:12-15

We know from the books of Samuel that David was allied with the King of Tyre who gave him the luxury items needed to build his palace. During those years, Tyre was an island (it is now a peninsula, a lot can change in three thousand years), and they traded in luxury items such as the cedars of Lebanon, tin, copper, ivory, perfumed oils and high-end hand crafted items. This shows a resurgence of luxury trade at around 1000BC, but a great deal of work was ahead of the nations to rebuild the wealth of the region, and much of that would have been hindered by the relentless wars, as everyone fought for survival and a secure, wealthy territorial share of the land and it's resources.

5. This is an area which needs much more research, but it is interesting to note that once the iron age was well established, nearly 800 years after David, the way **society interpreted and related to their world began to drastically change**. This impacts our understanding of David's life, as we find it incredibly difficult to relate to his Old Testament cultural worldview. Ancient acceptable practices such as slavery, genocide, polygamy etc. which deny civil rights, are far removed from our modern, Western values. We find these issues very difficult to deal with when they were carried out by Godly leaders such as David. His view of the world and what was acceptable under the Laws given through Moses, greatly differ from ours, and difficulties in understanding his thinking, motivation and actions frequently occur.



After David's time when people who were more settled and less at risk of starvation and political upheaval, they were now freer to invent, question how the cosmos and nature worked, and for the first time, begin to consider how man affects his own destiny, rather than every event being attributed to acts of the gods. This has been identified in studies which show how introspective language began to appear in literature part way through the New Testament and into the modern era.

We know that this societal change gave rise to the work of Plato, Aristotle, then later, Galileo, with the usurping of the flat earth theory. Mankind's hunger for scientific knowledge grew and started to displace reliance on gods. In David's time, the curiosity about the natural world would have been there, as is shown in the Psalms, but the ability to chase answers and formulate elaborate theories based on data collection, seemed to not exist. (Or evidence of this has been lost.) The theory is that people's energy was caught up in the desperate need for survival, which collectively affected all within the ancient world. Without the time to explore alternatives, people believed that their life was determined by their observance to their deity, who had to be appeased and who called the shots.

This is a completely different way of thinking which we cannot easily comprehend, as there are no Judaic, or Christian references to fully explain how it worked, in a manner we can grasp. Christianity was in the future of mankind and the Jewish Talmud (secular holy books interpreting the Old Testament and setting down laws which God did not give man), was not written until mankind had entered this philosophical and scientific age.

Understanding this conflicting world view has been a hard task for me and one I will continue to work on. I see God teaching His people the same values we now have since the earliest times, but to get to where we are now, was quite a process, and one that definitely reinforces how badly the world needed Jesus to set us on a better path. When studying David, I now take this difference in worldview into account. ■

## Bronze Age Collapse Essential Study Resources



**University of California, Berkeley:**

Web site: <http://cmes.berkeley.edu/category/videos/>

Youtube Channel: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-XXv-cvA\\_iBlm79tkbWrFKg9rwMVDytl](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-XXv-cvA_iBlm79tkbWrFKg9rwMVDytl)



**The Oriental Institute:**

Web site: <http://oi.uchicago.edu>

Youtube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/JamesHenryBreasted/videos>



### \*Affected Cities and Nations

Anatolia (Asia Minor): Troy, Miletus, Hattusas (Hittites), Mersin, Tarhuntassa

Cypres: Palaeokastro, Kition, Sinda, Enkomi

Mesopotamia: Ugarit, Tell Sukas, Kadesh, Qatna, Hamath, Alalakh, Aleppo, Carchemish, Emar

Levant / Canaan: Hazor, Akko, Megiddo, Deir 'Alla, Bethel, Beth Shemesh, Lachish, Ashod, Ashkelon

Modern Greece area: Teichos Dymaion, Pylos, Nichoria, The Menelaion, Tiryns, Mycenae, Thebes, Lefkandi, Iolkos, Knossos, Kydonia.

## Why The Bible Doesn't Work As A Mythological Tale

David fits the image of a hero. He potentially makes the perfect epic poetry type hero and his life does fit a perfect story arc. Does that make his life likely to be a fictional tale, or embellishment on the actual life of a man named David who was a King? Where does Scripture not fit myth?

While we associate non-Christians as being the ones who are the most likely to label Biblical truth as a moral tale or embellished story, Christians can also be found doing the same, as they do not believe that the Bible is the literal truth, or because the thinking of the world has affected them. Some of the saddest and most judgemental teachings I have seen on David's life have come through theologians who are not saved, but have studied critical theology as an intellectual interest and have published books which don't show any dedication to the spiritual character of Christianity. Thus they feel able to tear Biblical figures apart without mercy, and assign interpretations to Biblical events which aren't in line with either the message or the sanctity of the Word.

For example, "King David His Reign Revisited," by David L Wright. His work is written from a limited, biased standpoint, which is not in line with either the Jewish or Hebrew faiths. Wright teaches at Emory University as Associate Professor of the Hebrew Bible and has won awards for previous books. [<http://candler.emory.edu/faculty/profiles/wright-jacob.html>] In his own words: *"I enrolled in one of Reinhard Kratz's seminars in which we analyzed the formation of the Sinai account in Exodus and its relation to Deuteronomy. In the very first session I realized how extraordinary biblical literature is and how fascinating it is to study it critically."*

*"Most PhD students often have personal histories that prompted them to devote their lives to biblical studies. Nevertheless, these students usually know how to set aside, pragmatically, their personal religious convictions in order to create a space conducive to discussions with their colleagues who come from different backgrounds and have different commitments."* [Source: <http://thetorah.com/ten-questions-jacob-wright/>]

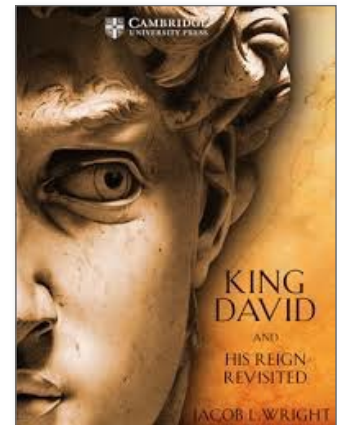
How sad it is that you can study the Word of God in such depth, and not let it touch your spirit.

In 2015 I wrote a blog post "Dames, Daggers and Dance: When History Forms It's Own Perfect Story Arc" which looked at David's life through the eyes of a story teller. I have been a writer since I was a child, and have always studied writing techniques. When studying David, I was surprised to see that the total accounts of his life form a story arc.

It made me wonder, whether the concept of the story arc was built on literature or reality? However, it did not make me wonder whether David's life was a fabricated legend and here's why.

David's life just doesn't work as a story. Here is a short list as to why, based on the many frustrations I've gone through in studying David's life.

1. Only the highlights and most necessary cautionary incidents, (useful for moral spiritual instruction,) have been told. It is like reading a biography retold in badly summarised dot points. There are far too many details missing which make parts hard to interpret and lead to heated debates. So much critical information about him is missing or unclear, I have nearly given up study in frustration several times. Trying to get a clear picture of key incidents is nearly impossible.



2. Pinpointing exactly when things happened, in what year and what age, is impossible, as is the correct order of events in 2 Samuel chapters 10-12 and 2 Samuel 23 to 24. Big events are written back to back, with no orientation as to how old David was, or how much time had passed. This is especially true of the Psalms.
3. You can only work out David's motivations by going back to the Torah and carefully studying Leviticus and Deuteronomy in detail (preferably the whole Torah); then by going forward to the Psalms and fitting it all together in a cultural context... which also has to be researched outside of the Bible, to understand the history and culture. In a story, you are told what someone's motivation is and why they act how they do.
4. The books of Samuel have multiple authors and David's story is completed in 1 Kings (written by yet another author,) and reiterated as more of a political tale in 1 Chronicles by yet, another author. That fracturing blasts apart the possibility of it being written as an allegory.
5. It's missing traditional narrative roles (such as ally and trickster), the people needed to push the tale forward into the next part, or give it more relatability. Also, God could fit many of the standard character roles, as David was close to Him, was helped by Him and powered by Him. That messes up the standard way deities are brought into legends.
6. David isn't the hero of his life story, God is, which is not a normal format. Readers want the key figure to be either a hero, or an anti-hero. David hands all the glory to God and constantly points people to Him to meet all their needs. [2 Samuel 22-23]
7. If you use Joseph Campbell's monomyth (The Hero With a Thousand Faces), it doesn't fit good story telling structure for an epic tale. Campbell wrote his book based on the way legends have been recorded since the beginning of time, from every culture able to be studied. I have tried to fit David's life into that structure, and it won't mould in, in too many places. I couldn't even take specific events and get them to form that iconic structure. For example, refusal of the call (David never did that); then the last seven stages don't apply, as David never returns home with the prize, going back to normal life, and there is no clear point of single victory. It is also interesting to note that David is not mentioned in Campbell's book as one of the studies legends. There is only an image of David and Goliath. I was sure he would be in there, but he's not. [Source: [http://www.jcf.org/new/index.php?categoryid=83&p9999\\_action=details&p9999\\_wid=692](http://www.jcf.org/new/index.php?categoryid=83&p9999_action=details&p9999_wid=692)]



## Specific Examples

a) The most complete chronicle in David's life is "David and Goliath," which has become an iconic symbol in both faith, and the secular world. It neatly unwinds and then wraps up, but few other anecdotes from David's life do. David's greatest achievements are making the nation of Isra'el safe from its enemies and the building of the first temple. The remaining details of Isra'el's journey to national safety are slim. You cannot recreate complete, engaging battle scenes and pinpoint a proper timeline of who, when and where, in the manner in which movies like Star Wars are made. We know a little about David's achievements as a warrior, and a little about Benaiah,



and a little about Joab, and a little about many characters... but not enough to build one complete character who we can understand. The Bible is just not meant to read as a legendary epic set of tales. It's an historical account with greatly limited information.

b) As for David's actions in returning of the Ark of the Covenant to the midst of the nation and the plans for building Israel's temple, this part of his life is impossible to understand without knowing the full history of Israel up until this point, and studying the way surrounding nations worshipped at that time... then to top that off, the long timeline of related events has a deeply unsatisfying ending.



In 2 Samuel 5-7 we can see how much David wants to build the temple and has it planned and prepared down to the last detail... then it doesn't happen until he is dead. Why? Because he obeys God... and we don't know what he is obeying unless we pick the account which starts in 2 Samuel 6 up in 1 Chronicles 22. Did you know that David gave his personal wealth over to help fund the temple? Probably not, because the complete set of details are scattered, and is hard work to put together and then correctly interpret. The story doesn't story.

c) As a final illustration of why David doesn't fit together as a work of fiction, we need to look at David and Bathsheba. Again it is hampered by a lack of information. Arguments rage as to whether she baited him, or he took advantage of an innocent young girl. To make that incident work as a proper tale, you need clearer and more content, plus, to make David and Bathsheba work as a single piece of fiction, you need more elements to make a proper story and cohesively pull all the summary into a readable work.

The prophet Nathan called David out his sin, but he'd need a far greater role as a mentor. And where is David or Bathsheba's best friend / sidekick to help move the tale along? The ambiguities which lead to heated accusations of rape would not be there. Every detail, including a clearer picture of David's thoughts and motivation would be included. Including literary devices such as Solomon's style of poetry in the Song of Songs would help too, but that does not exist. What we do have is an incident from David's life which teaches us consequences. It is not meant to be romanticised and to do so, is to disrespect the intention the Word of God has in telling us about Bathsheba.

David is real, raw, flawed, inspirational, conflicted and cohesive, or in other words, as complicated as any human, which is why we relate to him. If you looked at any of our life stories, they would be just as muddled, hard to follow and complex. From the point of view of a fiction writer and a Christian, David reinforces my belief that the Bible is God's inspired Word, not a man-made collection of religious propaganda.

*"Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations,  
And I will sing praises to Your name.  
He is a tower of deliverance to His king,  
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,  
To David and his descendants forever."* 2 Samuel 22:50-51 ■

## Why There is So Little Archaeological Evidence of David

There are anti-Semitic and anti-Bible arguments out there that David did not exist, as no archaeological evidence has been found of him. This has slowly changed. We have tablets from Moab which mention the House of David and the City of David has been found exactly where the books of Samuel locate it. Aside from a refusal to allow the Temple Mount to be excavated by archaeologists, there are practical reasons why more hasn't been discovered.

- David's era (roughly 1000 BC) is classed as "pre-history" due to the lack of written records which recorded events. Even though we have many artefacts from this time and before that, they only provide glimpses and hints as to what happened, and many crucial facts which would give us a clear picture of life in that era are missing for all the cultures in the Near East.
- The Laws handed down through Moses produced a dramatically different culture than that of the surrounding nations. Whereas pagan Kings built steles which commemorated their achievements and displayed their devotion to their gods, the Lord's command to not make graven images (idols) would have stopped righteous Israeli Kings from following the same practice. Pagan Kings associated their success, and justified their actions and right to rule by their close association with their gods. Stele's often show the Kings with a god in very close proximity to them, blessing their actions. Israel absolutely could not do this without breaking the Law's given by their God, Yahweh. Archaeologists who do not consider the impact of the Laws in the Torah may deny the existence of David if they are expecting to find artefacts such as steles. Less ego and an adherence to the law, equates to less evidence.
- David was a humble King who attributed his successes to the Lord, therefore it is doubtful that he would have built his own version of a stele, sans a god image. However, if his military victories had been recorded in any fashion, humble or otherwise, the evidence would have been destroyed by the sacking of Jerusalem and the palaces by Babylon when Judah was taken into captivity in 587 B.C. The only evidence we have of

## Evidence of David

### Tel Dan Stele

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i2eDI7nViw>

It is worth noting that David's name means beloved, so that would fit the criticism regardless.

"'David' Found at Dan," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 1994. Philip R. Davies, "'House of David' Built on Sand: The Sins of the Biblical Maximizers," *Biblical*

*Archaeology Review*, July/August 1994. David Noel Freedman and Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, "'House of David' Is There!" *Biblical*

*Archaeology Review*, March/April 1995. Ryan Byrne, "Archaeological Views: Letting David Go," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 2008.

"Strata: A House Divided: Davies and Maeir on the Tel Dan Stela," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 2013.

Avraham Biran, "Dan," in Ephraim Stern, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Biblical Archaeology Society, 2008).



**Mesha Stele:** Housed at the Louvre Museum

<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/mesha-stele>

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/artifacts-and-the-bible/moabite-stone-mesha-stele/>

subsequent kings such as Hezekiah, comes from other nations because of this.

- Isra'el's records may have been recorded on hide scrolls rather than clay tablets, which mean they would not have survived time. (3000 years)
- After the Late Bronze Age Collapse, all the nations from Cyprus in the Mediterranean through to Egypt, Assyrian, Tyre, and Babylon were thrown into disarray and forced into a long term survival mode. This collapse occurred during the era of the Book of Judges (1200 BC) and the effects lasted into and past David's time. Some nations took 300 years to recover.

Before and during the collapse, there were many diplomatic letters send back and forth between Kings, such as between the Kings of Egypt and Ugarit, which provide useful accounts of what occurred in the Near East during this time. These letters were well preserved on baked clay tablets, but in the dark age that followed the collapse, this ceased. Thus that kind of evidence was not generated in David's time, or not generated the same way. Again, if hide had been used rather than clay, it's rotted away to nothing.

Who knows, there could be much more evidence of David out there waiting to come to light... ■



Tel Dan Stele



Mesha Stele, Moab

© RMN, Musée du Louvre



## How David Compares to Other Near Eastern Kings

God changes everything in people's lives. He always has, He always will. Last year I began to dig back through ancient history to find out what the kings in David's era and part of the world were like. I wanted to know where the corruption that comes with royalty stemmed from. The search took me back far further than I had anticipated and I was stunned to know so much of the culture was still relevant and active in David's lifetime.

The roots of kingship go back to the first city states which sprung up in Mesopotamia, where people decided to group together and organise to make survival easier: and of course, someone grabbed power. We don't know who the first "king" was. They could have been a reputed warrior, a respected priest or someone who was simply savvy enough to take the opportunity to be the guy in charge. You know the deal. It doesn't matter how many thousands of years have gone past, (estimated to be six thousand by historians,) it's still a man in a fancier hat with a better house, servants and loads more money than everyone else. Kingship has been synonymous with excess and abuses of power since the beginning not because people tend to be a little jealous, but because that is the way things really are.

When kings first came in society changed. The power stopped being in the hands of the people, or a democratic committee of people. Women started to be treated as lesser beings and the class system was "invented" where some had more and some had less, rather than everyone working towards survival. God gave His people a command from the beginning of time: *"go forth and multiply."* [Ref. Genesis 9:7] We were never meant to be clustered together in unhealthy cities with a class and sexist divide which shoves God out of the picture. For the sake of an easier life, our ancestors gave that up and nothing has really changed. We are still suspicious of the number 13, we still exalt people into insane positions of wealth and power, and humanity leans away from the freedom that God wanted for us, creating social problems, mental illness and all manner of physical sickness.

By the time I got to David, three thousand years later, I was mortified to see the same system being maintained and concerned at the similarities between paganism and How Israel functioned. For example, the kings were always placed in



Sumerian King List Stele



power by their deity, the altars had horns, and the priests needs were catered for the same way. There were a lot of parallels where the base culture that had produced Abraham had stuck in people's minds and had gone through very little modification; the gods were basically the same; no one had grown. The whole structure of society was essentially a corruption of what God had intended.

As I said above, God changes everything in people's lives. He always has, He always will and He did that with David. Saul bought straight into the culturally accepted, corrupt mode of kingship, and David did follow that to a significant degree, but he was different. David had been bought up strong in the faith and he doggedly stayed on that path, despite being exiled from fellowship and access to Israel's worship practices by Saul. [Ref. 1 Samuel 26:19-20] He followed the laws in the Torah which God had handed down through Moses, and this made him distinct from any other king. He was so distinct that it's given historians a reason to doubt he ever existed, as he didn't leave the usual marks of kingship behind for us to find.

The biggest thing a king did in the ancient Near East was build a temple. Now David did that, but not in the same way. Normally when a Near Eastern king came into power, they set up their own capital city regardless of what already existed (he did that); named it after them (he didn't do that); then build yet another temple to their god to show what a devout, god-chosen leader they were. No temple existed in Israel until David decided that his living large while God dwelled in a tent was just not right. Why? Saul was not a man of religious fervour, to put it mildly. It is doubtful he would have weighed up the difference between his home and God's and decided to put the situation right. God had asked Moses to build the tabernacle, which was a nice tent situation, so that would do. It takes a different heart to choose not to live in greater splendour than the One to whom you owe you life, your success and your future. David had that humble heart that cared about His creator.



Lion-men orthostat relief from Herald's wall, Carchemish, 850-750 BC. Late Hittite style under Aramaean influence. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, Turkey.

David's humility also kept him from following in some of the other time-worn customs of kings. Yes, he did accumulate wives like other kings, which was against the law and had consequences which he regretted deeply. He did grab the King of Rabbah's elaborate crown for himself... but he did not sing his own praises from the palace roof. Yes, of course he would have succumbed to ego on occasion. When even your wives bow and scrape before you, the human brain is going to go places it should not venture, and you'll have a tough time staying humble. But David was undeniably modest compared to a typical king. [Ref. Rabbah 2 Samuel 12:29-30]

Other kings had elaborate stele (victory memorials), and/or commemorative orthostats (carved scenes on the walls) in their palace, telling everyone who visited how they had won wars, taken slaves and been the best of the best: a powerful man that you don't mess with. David did none of this. Stele's nearly always had their god carved into the picture in close proximity to the king to reinforce the idea that the king was chosen, blessed and victorious because of their god. It is the kind of idol imagery which is forbidden in the ten commandments and that may have been one reason why David didn't do it. He recorded his life events through Psalms, some of which are like victory steles, others which are cries for help, but nothing else has been discovered. We have ancient Babylonian and Assyrian statues and orthostats which pre-date David, but nothing has been found of his as it appears, it just wasn't his thing. Yes, it could have been destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked by Babylon; but there is no Biblical account of any such objects being made, even though we know which of his great-grandsons thought it would be fashionable to paint the palace walls red.

Read the Psalms: *"I will tell of the marvellous things You have done."* Psalm 9:1b and *"I will exalt You Lord, because You have rescued me."* Psalm 30 David never takes the glory for himself, he always gives it to God. It would be completely incongruent to his character to build memorials to himself for what God had done.

David was also humble in the empire department. When kings traditionally went on campaign each spring to expand their control, we find David staying at home in Jerusalem while Joab gets on with the security-related tasks. [Ref. 2 Samuel 11:1, Joab was dealing with the aftermath of 2 Samuel 10.] He dealt with the enemies of Israel, but he didn't get ambitious beyond that. It was common for kings to start expanding their territory just because they could. David didn't. It's that simple. The Lord had said, *"I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more."* 2 Samuel 12:8 It looks like David simply did not ask God for more. He was satisfied with a secure nation and the blessing he had. Psalm 34:14 .... says *"seek peace and work to maintain it."* Taking this general attitude and his habit of not joining Joab on the battlefield unless it was absolutely necessary, it appears David was simply not a war-mongering conquerer.

He didn't give himself a grandiose title or nickname either. King Lugal-zaggisi of Sumer claimed that he ruled the four quarters of the world, even though he was only the ruler of the neighbouring regions of Sumer and Akkad. Etana, King of Kish, called himself "the shepherd, who ascended to heaven and consolidated all the foreign countries." En-me-barage-si, also of Kish, referred to himself as the one: "who made the land of Elam submit," and Kubaba, the only female king, called herself: "the woman tavern-keeper, who made firm the foundations of Kish." David once referred to himself as the "sweet singer of Israel," but it was it.

I have often called David the anti-king because of his humility, but the glory doesn't even go to him for achieving that. While it was his choice to be open to the leading and correction of the Holy Spirit, at the end of the day, it was God's work in David which turned him into the awesome man he became. As many have said, David was the start of an era and the end of that era... and that era was planned and put into place by his God, YHWH, who did this not just for David, He did it for all of His people. God changes everything in people's lives. He always has, He always will. ■

## Who Was He?

Hammurabi (c. 1810 BC - 1750 BC) was the sixth king of the First Babylonian Dynasty, reigning from 1792 BC to 1750 BC (according to the Middle Chronology). He was preceded by his father, Sin-Muballit, who abdicated due to failing health. He extended Babylon's control throughout Mesopotamia through military campaigns. Hammurabi is known for the Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest surviving codes of law in recorded history. The name Hammurabi derives from the Amorite term 'Ammurāpi ("the kinsman is a healer"), itself from 'Ammu ("paternal kinsman") and Rāpi ("healer")



Hammurabi (standing), depicted as receiving his royal insignia from Shamash (or possibly Marduk). Hammurabi holds his hands over his mouth as a sign of prayer (relief on the upper part of the stele of Hammurabi's code of laws). *Wikipedia*

## When Terrifying Psalms Suddenly Look Quite Tame

Over the last six months I have been studying ancient history from a secular point of view, in order to understand the culture of Isra'el and the forces which shaped her idolatry. It's been a fascinating time which I have enjoyed, but it has taken me to some pretty dark places!

To understand David and what social mindsets slid into the Psalms, I have looked at a number of pagan hymns, the epic of Gilgamesh and this week, the Code of the Babylonian King, Hammurabi. One thing sure stood out to me: if you thought Psalms such as Psalm 109 were pretty savage, you aint seen nothing yet! **Trigger Warning: violent, gory content.**

Here is a hit of Babylonian royal ego which will make you think about David's roughest works in a completely different way. His slant is more towards divine justice than calling down divine revenge. I will leave it to you to mull over the contrast. I am still getting my head around it.

First, here is one of David's Psalms of vengeance, Psalm 58:  
*For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy!"*  
*"Justice—do you rulers know the meaning of the word?*  
*Do you judge the people fairly?*  
*No! You plot injustice in your hearts.*  
*You spread violence throughout the land.*  
*These wicked people are born sinners;*  
*even from birth they have lied and gone their own way.*  
*They spit venom like deadly snakes;*  
*they are like cobras that refuse to listen,*  
*ignoring the tunes of the snake charmers,*  
*no matter how skilfully they play.*  
*Break off their fangs, O God!*  
*Smash the jaws of these lions, O LORD!*  
*May they disappear like water into thirsty ground.*  
*Make their weapons useless in their hands.*  
*May they be like snails that dissolve into slime,*  
*like a stillborn child who will never see the sun.*  
*God will sweep them away, both young and old,*  
*faster than a pot heats over burning thorns.*  
*The godly will rejoice when they see injustice avenged.*  
*They will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.*  
*Then at last everyone will say,*  
*"There truly is a reward for those who live for God;*  
*surely there is a God who judges justly here on earth."*

Now for Hammerabi. I have slashed this down to 273 words. There are another 1604 words in the epilogue where Hammurabi takes the time to say how great he is. Plus there is a heap more self



exultation in the prologue.  
The odd names are all  
referring to pagan gods.

*"May Zamama, the great warrior, the first-born son of E-Kur, who goeth at my right hand, shatter his weapons on the field of battle, turn day into night for him, and let his foe triumph over him.*

*May Ishtar, the goddess of fighting and war, who unfetters my weapons, my gracious protecting spirit, who loveth my dominion, curse his kingdom in her angry heart; in her great wrath, change his grace into evil, and shatter his weapons on the place of fighting and war. May she create disorder and sedition for him, strike down his warriors, that the earth may drink their blood, and throw down the piles of corpses of his warriors on the field; may she not grant him a life of mercy, deliver him into the hands of his enemies, and imprison him in the land of his enemies.*

*May Nergal, the might among the gods, whose contest is irresistible, who grants me victory, in his great might burn up his subjects like a slender reed stalk, cut off his limbs with his mighty weapons, and shatter him like an earthen image.*

*May Nin-tu, the sublime mistress of the lands, the fruitful mother, deny him a son, vouchsafe him no name, give him no successor among men. May Nin-karak, the daughter of Anu, who adjudges grace to me, cause to come upon his members in E-kur high fever, severe wounds, that can not be healed, whose nature the physician does not understand, which he can not treat with dressing, which, like the bite of death, can not be removed, until they have sapped away his life."*

If you would like to read more, you can find the full, mind boggling legal code here: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/ham/index.htm> Some of it is very fair; some of it makes your head spin. They were hard times to be alive. ■



A close up of the stele featuring the code of Hammurabi.



## Our God is a Different God

Over the last few months I have been studying the ancient history of the Near East to get a handle on how the surrounding nations impacted King David's life. This is impossible to do without running into dozens and dozens and dozens of pagan deities. One thing that has struck me time and time again, is how radically different our God, YHWH, is compared to the other gods. Moses agrees with me: *"For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on Him? And what great nation has decrees and regulations as righteous and fair as this body of instructions that I am giving you today?"* Deuteronomy 4:7-8

Studying ancient history has shown me similarities between Biblical stories (\*the flood) and how YHWH was worshipped, so how do I know that YHWH is the one true god? Because He is so distinctively unique.

Firstly, how do I account for the similarities in worship between Mesopotamia and Israel, which include blood sacrifice, the system for supporting priests; incense, music used in worship, the altars having horns, and the similarities in spiritual language? Scott Aniol from Answers in Genesis sums up what I was thinking beautifully: *"All nations had a common ancestry in Adam, and God's self-revelation was part of their heritage, thus accounting for any similarities in worship practice that exist."* Worship stemmed from one God and one original system which was corrupted for man-made divinities. This form of corrupted worship in the Mesopotamian world remained in vogue for over four thousand years, and some practices (such as the fear of the number 13) still affect many world cultures today.

What is also interesting, is how the Laws that God gave through Moses seem to be put in place to stop the Israelites from copying many of the pagan practices of other religions. For example, the Israelites were told: *"A woman must not put on men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable in the sight of the LORD your God."* Deuteronomy 22:5 In some Mesopotamian ritual processions, the participants dressed half as men, half as women to worship their god. The more I study, the more I realise how much cultural information is lost to us, which sheds an entirely new light on Biblical precepts.

I could write a book on everything I have learned, but the main point I want to leave you with is how YHWH is a distinctive deity:

### Deities of the ancient Near East

#### Levantine (Canaanite)

Adonis • Anat • Asherah • Ashima • Astarte • Atargatis • Attar • Baal • Berith • Chemosh • Dagon • El • Elyon • Eshmun • Gad • Hadad • Kothar-wa-Khasis • Melqart • Moloch • Mot • Nikkal • Qetesh • Resheph • Shadrafa • Shahr • Shalim • Shapash • Yahweh • Yam • Yarikh

#### Mesopotamian

Abzu/Apsu • Adad • Amurru • An/Anu • Anshar • Ashur • Enki/Ea • Enlil • Ereshkigal • Inanna/Ishtar • Kingu • Kishar • Lahamu • Lahmu • Marduk • Mummu • Nabu • Nammu • Nanna/Sin • Nergal • Ningishzida • Ninhursag • Ninlil • Tiamat • Utu/Shamash

#### Egyptian

Amun • Apis • Atum • Buchis • Geb • Horus • Isis • Montu • Nephthys • Nut • Osiris • Ptah • Ra • Set • Shu • Tefnut • Thoth

#### Elamite

Inshushinak • Jabru • Khumban • Kiririsha • Lahurati • Nahundi • Napir • Ninsusinak • Pinikir

Screen shot source:  
Wikipedia

1. The Israelites could only have **one religious relic/artefact**, which was the Ark of the Covenant which had the manifest Presence of God upon it. Unlike polytheism, where there are many statues of a god made for every temple and need, there was no limit to the number. YHWH specifically banned the making of such images to represent Him. [Ref. Exodus 34:17]

### 2. YHWH is way above the average intelligence of other gods

Some Mesopotamians created statues of themselves praying that they could place in their temples to make their gods think they were being prayed to all the time, and the gods knew no difference. According to the Jewish Virtual Library: *"An idol, in the pagan mind, was a living and feeling being... The god's spirit dwelt within the idol and was identified with it. The god was not confined to a single idol or a single shape; rather his spirit dwelt within many idols of varied shapes. The god perceived and sensed whatever happened to its idol... The argument offered by the Psalmist (Ps. 106:36; 115:9), 'they have eyes but they do not see' should be taken literally... The Biblical description of idolatry as 'sacrifices to the dead,' (Ps. 106:28) and of idols as 'wood and stone,' (Deut. 28:36, 64), and similar descriptions, challenge the pagan claim that the images they worshiped were in fact 'living idols.'"* [Source: [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0009\\_0\\_09475.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09475.html)]

### 3. YHWH has exceptional moral character

"And Jehovah (YHWH) came down in the cloud. And he placed himself there with Him, and he called on the name of Jehovah. And Jehovah passed by before his face and called out: Jehovah! Jehovah God! Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and great in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and not leaving entirely unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on sons, and on sons of sons, to the third and to the fourth generation." Exodus 34:5-7

God's were prone to the human traits of bitterness, revenge, theft, deception and basically, behaviour which is "fleshly." [Ref. Galatians 5:16-25] Pagan gods are recorded as viciously punishing their followers over hurt feelings, regardless of who was responsible. This was a way to account for the tragedies and baffling ups and downs of life.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, King Gilgamesh refuses to marry the goddess Ishtar and reminds her of how she has abused the affection of her past lovers. In vengeance, she complains to her father, who at first says, "serves you right," but then: *"Ishtar opened her mouth and said again, 'My father, give me the Bull of Heaven to destroy Gilgamesh. Fill Gilgamesh, I say, with arrogance to his destruction; but if you refuse to give me the Bull of Heaven I will break in the doors of hell and smash the bolts; there will be confusion of people, those above with those from the lower depths. I shall bring up the dead to eat food like the living; and the hosts of dead will outnumber the living.' Anusa said to great Ishtar, 'If I do what you desire there will be seven years of drought throughout Uruk when corn will be seedless husks. Have you saved*

## Canaan

Have you ever wondered why the Canaanite gods were so appealing to the Israelites? Here is one possible answer: Canaanite gods allowed and required a lot of guilt-free, anything-goes sex.

Whoever had originally been given 'revelatory truth' about the gods of Canaan, obviously had a clear agenda, which was all about getting what they wanted and ensuring that the system stayed that way. This may have been a genuine belief, but not everyone in a culture has the same level of belief and the way is open for exploitation.

This is another example of manipulation of a god. Any promise of more fun, less guilt and less responsibility still draws us in, even in an era where we use science to get rid of the 'god problem' by eliminating the need for Him.

Wherever humans stand in time, we're trying to ditch justice and judgement.

*grain enough for the people and grass for the cattle? Ishtar replied. 'I have saved grain for the people, grass for the cattle; for seven years of seedless husks there is grain and there is grass enough.'* “

"She stirs confusion and chaos against those who are disobedient to her, speeding carnage and inciting the devastating flood, clothed in terrifying radiance. It is her game to speed conflict and battle, untiring, strapping on her sandals." Battle itself is sometimes referred to as "the dance of Inanna." [Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inanna>]



Molech

YHWH is not prone to such human faults and appalling acts of retribution. As we read in Exodus 34:5-7, He is open to reconciliation rather than murder. His people have to completely turn their back on Him before they are cursed.

**4. YHWH is not dependent upon us to provide any of His needs.** According to Mesopotamian mythology, human beings were created so the gods would have servants. *"Man shall be charged with the service of the gods, that they might be at ease."* Babylonian Creation myth.

While the Hebrews (later Israel,) served YHWH, it was by obedience and through worship, they didn't provide for His physical needs or were used and abused for His pleasure.

To please Anu, you had to do the following, (plus meet all the other requirements,): *"Several times a day in an elaborate ritual the god was served a sumptuous meal. The courses were set out before the statue of the god or goddess, music was played, and incense was sprinkled. Here is a daily menu for the god Anu at Uruk: 12 vessels of wine 2 vessels of milk, 108 vessels of beer, 243 loaves of bread, 29 bushels of dates, 21 rams, 2 bulls, 1 bullock, 8 lambs, 60 birds, 3 cranes, 7 ducks, 4 wild boars, 3 ostrich eggs, 3 duck eggs."*

[Source: <http://www.dl.ket.org/humanities/connections/class/ancient/mesopreligion.htm>]

Instead, He meets ours! *"And He will love you, and bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your oxen and the wealth of your flock, in the land which He has sworn to your fathers, to give it to you. You shall be blessed above all people; there shall not be a barren man or a barren woman among you, nor among your livestock. And Jehovah shall turn aside every sickness from you; and He will not put on you any of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you have known, but He will put them on all who hate you."* Deuteronomy 7:13-15 Literal Translation of the Holy Bible



Enki

**5. YHWH is accessible** to all of His followers, not just the elite or the priests. "The higher-echelon did all the preparation, and private individuals only came into contact with the gods when statues of deities were brought out of the temple and carried through the streets." [Source: <http://www.dl.ket.org/humanities/connections/class/ancient/mesopreligion.htm>]

**6. YHWH cannot be controlled by man**

*"Since the god fully identified with its idol, whoever controlled the idol also controlled the god. When the king of Elam saw that he was about to be defeated by Sennacherib, he took his idols and fled in order that they*



*[the idols] should not fall captive... The custom of taking captive the idols of the vanquished was ancient and widespread... Rab-Shakeh wanted to impress upon the people of Judah the fact that the gods of the neighbouring nations failed to protect them from the armies of Sennacherib. (Isaiah 36:18–20; 37:10–12) Source:*

[https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0009\\_0\\_09475.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09475.html)

It was believed that once you had the idol, you controlled the god who would do your bidding if you appeased them. From there, any success would be possible. YHWH is completely resistant to manipulation. This is shown in Numbers 22 with Balaam who was ordered by the Moabite King, Balak, to curse the Israelites. *“But Balaam responded to Balak’s messengers, “Even if Balak were to give me his palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the LORD [YHWH] my God.”*

## 7. YHWH is not a God who has to retreat.

*When in enemies' hands, the power of the idol vanished. The vanquished kings would come and beg for the return of the idols; to return an idol to his temple was considered an act of mercy. Because of his fear of the enemy, the god would leave the idol "and fly to the heavens" Jeremiah 50:1–3 makes reference to this belief).*

[Source: [https://](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09475.html)

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A pair of protective spirits from Nimrud.

Our God rules over all and has no need of retreat, and no fear of man as He showed when He delivered His people from Pharaoh in Exodus, which David acknowledged when he said: *“O LORD, there is no one like You. We have never even heard of another God like You! What other nation on earth is like Your people Israel? What other nation, O God, have You redeemed from slavery to be Your own people? You made a great name for Yourself when You redeemed Your people from Egypt. You performed awesome miracles and drove out the nations that stood in their way. You chose Israel to be Your very own people forever, and You, O LORD, became their God.”* 1 Chronicles 17:20-22

**Conclusion:** *“For who in all of heaven can compare with the LORD? What mightiest angel is anything like the LORD?”* Psalm 89:6 How blessed we are.



## Notes:

\*Flood stories were recorded well after the event, so pagan cultures associated what occurred with their cultural beliefs at the time. ■



## David's Stelae: The Psalms as Public Memorials and Private Prayers

*"I will tell of the marvellous things You have done."*  
Psalm 9:1b

*"I will exalt You, Lord, because You have rescued me."* Psalm 30:1a

A stele is *"an upright stone slab or pillar bearing an inscription or design and serving as a monument, marker, or the like."* [Source: Dictionary.com] They were widely used in the Near East millennia before David, and well after his time. It was standard practice for kings to have steles and statues of themselves made as positive propaganda to support their reign. However, David didn't follow this practice. In line with the \*ten commandments, he didn't have himself pictured with a representation of YHWH behind him, neither did he carve his achievements in stone. Apart from the book of Samuel and 1 Chronicles, the only memorials we have to David are his Psalms, some of which could be likened to victory steles, and others which have an interesting function.



Roughly half of all the Psalms that are attributed to David were sent to the choir director and made public, and 50% of those Psalms were written when he was in great distress. We don't know how the other Psalms were used, but it is possible that the ones which have not been specifically marked as *"for the choir director"* were in his personal collection, then organised into books after his death. His Psalms which are marked as prayers: 17, 86, and 142, were notably not sent to the choir director.

Some of the Psalms that were made public had national themes: Psalm 60 was written while David grappled with Israel's failures in the battle in the Valley of Salt, and is noted as being useful for teaching; the wording of Psalm 67 is a mix of a prayer and a benediction; and Psalm 58 is an outspoken challenge to the people of Israel on justice [see the final chapter below for clarification]. David also sent Psalm 53 to the choir director, making a public statement of faith with *"only fools deny God."*

Using my \*\*own classification of the Psalms (I get lost in the theological classifications, so I divided them further for my own use), these are the victory Psalms that David wanted sung before the Lord:

- ✦ Psalm 9: I will tell of all the marvellous things You have done.
- ✦ Psalm 18: When rescued from Saul and the enemies in that period of time.
- ✦ Psalm 20: May the LORD answer all your prayers.
- ✦ Psalm 21: How the king rejoices in Your strength, O LORD!
- ✦ Psalm 30: Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.

The Psalms of joy and wonder, plus David's statements of faith that were sent to the choir director include Psalms 8, 11, 19, 62, 65, 66, 67, 53 and 58.

One thing which occurred to me when looking at which Psalms were attributed to specific events and could be considered memorials, is that there are no Psalms specifically linked to David's most notable victories such as killing Goliath, bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, or his battle achievements. He didn't mention God's special covenant with Him, or his plans to build the temple; (neither did David ask for it to be named after him.) This is a testament to David's

humility, despite the moral dips which occurred with Bathsheba and the census.

The stone tablet with the code written on it. This was placed in a public space so that all could read it.

God is always the focus of David's songs, which is another significant difference between him and any other ruler. He never claims honour or victory for himself. For an example, read the \*\*\*Code of Hammurabi which has massive chunks at the beginning and end, glorifying and justifying the rule of Hammurabi. For example: *"Hammurabi, the prince... making riches and increase, enriching Nippur and Dur-ilu beyond compare... who conquered the four quarters of the world, made great the name of Babylon...who enriched Ur; the humble, the reverent, who brings wealth..."*

David's work shows that he was transparent in how he talked about his life in public and that he wasn't hung up on appearances. He freely admitted his faults and struggles and the glory for his successes always went to the Lord. Psalm 51, which speaks of his correction by Nathan over Bathsheba, and how sin affected him, was made public. Whether that was to address his sin because it was public knowledge, or whether it was to be used as a teaching aid to strengthen the faith of the people and encourage righteousness, or both, I honestly don't know.

Psalm 3, which was about when he fled from Absalom, Psalm 34 where he escaped from Philistine territory feigning madness and Psalm 52, where he was betrayed by Doeg to Saul, weren't marked for use by the choir director either. Not using Psalm 52 appears odd, as all the other betrayal Psalms were publicly sung. Perhaps it wasn't copied or notated correctly, or perhaps David had some private reason for not sending it on? I wish I knew.

These are the Psalms which have a definite event associated with them and could be considered a form of victory stele.

- ✦ 7 - concerning Cush of the tribe of Benjamin
- ✦ 18 - rescued from all enemies and Saul [PUBLIC]
- ✦ 30 - dedication of the temple / house [PUBLIC]
- ✦ 54 - betrayed by Ziphites [PUBLIC]
- ✦ 56 - seized at Gath [PUBLIC]
- ✦ 57 - when fled from Saul and went to the cave [PUBLIC]
- ✦ 59 - soldiers watching his house [PUBLIC]

The last point of interest is David's request that two Psalms which relate to persecution by Saul, (57 and 59,) be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy." Knowing the old title attached to that melody would add a clear message to the Psalm, which would be noted by anyone knowing that piece of music. Other Psalmists also requested the same for their work.

"Do Not Destroy" is also the melody which was selected for Psalm 58: *"Justice—do you rulers know the meaning of the word?"* In Bible Hub's interlinear Bible, "ruler" is elem, or congregation. [Strong's

## Psalm Facts

David states in Psalm 119:54 (thought to be David's) that the Word of the Lord has been the theme of his songs.

If you read Leviticus and Deuteronomy, then turn straight to Psalm 1 to start reading, you will see how heavily the laws that God handed down through Moses, colour his work.

Rabbis have been known to tell people that if you don't want to study Torah, study the Psalms because you'll still learn the laws of God.



Many of the Psalms in which David pleads for God to deal with his enemies justly, don't only refer to David's need to keep his throne and be safe.

As David was God's anointed king, for him to be deposed would be for God's will to be thwarted. Thus it is acceptable that he should call down God's judgement.

An example of this is Psalm 17, a prayer of David.

Number 482] It is a masculine word, which is culturally correct as the assembly of believers was all male in David's time. Some Bibles say gods, some say sons of men. There is no correct consensus. It is a source of profound frustration to me that words such as this are so poorly translated in our Bibles, and a reminder to dig deeper to find the true meaning of the Word of God.



#### Notes:

\**"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."* Exodus 20:4-6

\*\* My easy to navigate classifications of the Psalms: <http://cateartios.wix.com/kingdavidproject#/psalm-classifications/c2180>

\*\*\*The Code of Hammurabi translated by L.W. King <http://www.general-intelligence.com/library/hr.pdf> and the Louvre Museum's page on it: <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/law-code-hammurabi-king-babylon> ■



## The Deep Ancient Roots the Psalms Sprang From

Regardless of what age or nationality you are, the culture around you will affect how you worship. Old Western hymns were set to popular tunes of the day so that people would relate to them, and edifying Christian hip hop and rap music is popular with Christian youth in our current time.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. Jesus communicated His message in a form which people understood and could relate to. It makes perfect sense. However, when studying the ancient history of the Near East (pre-Abraham), I was surprised at how much some of the cultic hymns sounded like David's Psalms.

Compare these two:

*"Mighty, majestic, and radiant,  
You shine brilliantly in the evening,  
You brighten the day at dawn,  
You stand in the heavens like the sun and the moon,  
Your wonders are known both above and below..."*

and

*“The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;  
where morning dawns, where evening fades,  
you call forth songs of joy.”*

Who wrote what? The first one is a Sumerian hymn about Inanna (Ishtar,) the pagan 'Queen of Heaven;' the second is part of David's Psalm 65. Did that leave you with an awful feeling in the pit of your stomach? I was startled, then realised that this point of time is so far back, both David and the writer of the hymn had the same roots: they both originally came from the one God, YHWH. Psalms by the Sons of Korah and Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89) have the same features. It's simply a cultural way of song writing.

*“The key elements of worship that appear in most religions are instituted in the first few chapters of Genesis. God places Adam and Eve in his sanctuary as priests who serve him and commune with him. After they disobey him, God institutes the idea of substitutionary sacrifice and atonement, establishing a covenant with them. Each of these elements characterises the worship of all religions since they are part of the religious heritage of all children of Adam. As Rodríguez notes, “those religious expressions belong to the common human experience of God” (Rodríguez 2001, 47). Romans 1:19–20 testifies to this when it says that God has revealed himself to all people through “the things that have been made.” [Source: Worldview Bias and the Origin of Hebrew Worship by Scott Aniol, source link below.]*

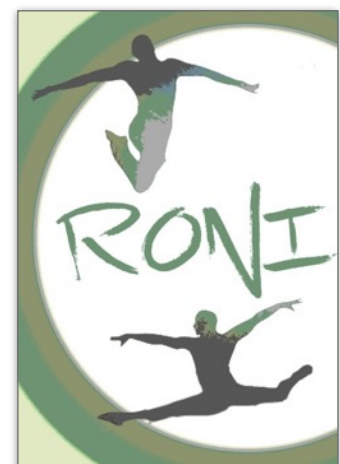
There is a major difference between the way that David approaches his God and the way the worshippers of the pagan god, Inanna worshipped: David has confidence!

*“Be merciful to me, O Lord; for I cry to You daily.  
Give joy to the soul of Your servant; for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and rich in mercy to all those who call on You.  
Give ear, O Jehovah, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my prayers.  
In the day of my trouble I will call on You; for You will answer me.” Psalm 86:3-7*

You don't find that kind of confidence in hymns for the pagan gods. From the ones I read, some of them don't even make any kind of sense, but David had two things in his favour: the indwelling Spirit of God which gave him a direct link to the one true God, and a righteous boldness. He knew that God was with him and that YHWH was his source of comfort, deliverance, healing, joy and salvation. David was welcome to *"boldly approach the throne of grace,"* long before those words appeared in our New Testament. [Ref. Hebrews 4:16 and Ephesians 3:12]

*“The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out,  
“Yahweh! The LORD!  
The God of compassion and mercy!  
I am slow to anger  
and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.  
I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.  
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.  
But I do not excuse the guilty.” Exodus 34:6-7a*

Inanna had to be appeased, tip toed around. The pagan gods were the scapegoats that man made to explain the mysteries of why bad things happen and how the natural elements of the world functioned. They created jealous, angry gods with human frailties, who you bribed into happiness so nothing went wrong.





Looking at hymns which came from a different part of the Near East, Scott Aniol goes on to say: *"When comparing the psalms of Israel with those of Ugarit people, important distinctions emerge as well. According to Walton, "the category of declarative praise is unique to Israel"... Biblical history and pagan myth have very different purposes, functions, and literary forms and therefore must not be interpreted in the same manner."*

The same applies to cultic observations about a flood and a baby sent down a river in a basket who was rescued by a princess and bought up in a royal court. The events were written about long after they happened, with the then current pagan interpretations added.

So if you ever come across strange similarities between paganism and the Bible, don't take them as evidence that your faith isn't based on a faithful, genuine God. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* John 1:1-5



Notes:

<https://answersingenesis.org/presuppositions/bias-and-origin-of-hebrew-worship/> This is a great article, please take the time to read it.

*"Inanna was associated with the planet Venus, which at that time was regarded as two stars, the "morning star" and the "evening star. The discontinuous movements of Venus relate to both mythology as well as Inanna's dual nature. Inanna is related like Venus to the principle of connectedness, but this has a dual nature and could seem unpredictable. Yet as both the goddess of love and war, with both masculine and feminine qualities, Inanna is poised to respond, and occasionally to respond with outbursts of temper. Mesopotamian literature takes this one step further, explaining Inanna's physical movements in mythology as corresponding to the astronomical movements of Venus in the sky." There are hymns to Inanna as her astral manifestation."* [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inanna>] ■



Pottery found in Israel by the Parker Excavation.

## Author

"From Despair to Deliverance: the King David Project," is a non-profit ministry, that seeks to make the life of King David easy to understand and relevant, so that believers gain inspiration and comfort from the life of King David. The project is run by Cate Russell-Cole, a Christian writer from Brisbane, Australia.

- The Project web site: <http://cateartios.wix.com/kingdavidproject>
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